

## Ghosts along the River Walk

Sometimes on October nights when the mist hangs low and the wind is right, you can smell the pots of cooking fish and hear the clanging of scales and lose iron hooks.

Walk along the River Walk north of Josephson's Smoke house. In the daylight you will see the remains of a rusted boiler in the river and an empty restaurant that was once the Ships Inn.

In the evening when the fog climbs up from the river and settles, you will see ladies in white caps and stained aprons leaving the old cannery. Sometimes they are linking arms and laughing. When you see them, the temperature drops at least ten degrees. Sometimes you can hear them whistling a tune that you can't recognize.

Sometimes when you stare out into the fog drenched river, you see Clatsop Canoes. Their paddles dip and the water swirls. They sing a deep rolling song. They were the river, they were the salmon, they were the sealion. Ancient songs of gratitude pour out of the canoe and linger in your ears.

You can see the shadow of ocean-going ships and tiny gillnetters with their running lights on.

Canneries and fish houses along the Columbia River have all but disappeared. Many Astorians still remember working in tuna or salmon canneries. They remember the noises and the smells of fish oil and creosote. Almost all of the old homes had a shower out in the garage and hooks to hang their smelly work clothes and stinky shoes. The money was good and the camaraderie was better. Their feet hurt and their back ached but it was good work when the fish were running.

The Clatsop people identified a season as The Time of the Salmon Running. They celebrated it. It was their manna from the sea.

Waves of Europeans came and turned all that silver into gold. Gillnetters unloaded boats full of salmon at the fish houses. Salmon canneries buzzed and jingles full of ladies wearing white caps and white aprons. All along the river front was the smell of fish. The gulls wheeled overhead begging for scraps.

Up river pulp and paper mills dumped poisons into the water. On the other side of the mountains, farmers sprayed pesticides on apple trees and it washed into the watershed. Dams tamed the wildness of the mighty Columbia. The canneries burned or were transformed into restaurants and waterfront hotels.

Ocean going ships still ply the waters waiting for pilots to guide them upriver or out past the foaming bar. The tide still pushes and pulls and slaps at the pilings that once supported the canneries and fish houses and net sheds.

The generous runs of the silver fish disappeared along with everything that they had spawned. The time of the salmon Running is no more.